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# 'Jesus' Agca turns papal plot trial into Roman circus

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ROME — Shouting "I am Jesus Christ" in a crowded courtroom, Mehmet Ali Agca, the convicted triggerman in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II, yesterday dissolved the opening of the trial of four Turks and three Bulgarians into histrionics.

Sergei Antonov, accused by Agca in the plot and the only one of three Bulgarians in Italian custody, sat impassively in his cage.

The Turkish gunman, serving a life term for shooting the pope in 1981, wasted no time in making himself the star attraction before the world's news media on the opening day of the trial.

First mugging for photographers from behind the bars of his defendant's cage, then trying to get the judge's attention, Agca finally disrupted the trial by shouting in Italian: "I am Jesus Christ! I am omnipotent! I announce the end of the world! The world will be destroyed!"

Agca's outburst, which led to his expulsion for five minutes, seemed in keeping with the circus-like atmosphere of the opening session. "The show's over," a police officer told reporters when the 27-year-old Turk was led away.

When Agca was called to testify later in the day, he tried to expound on the case.

"We are here to ascertain the truth of the facts on the attempt on the life of the pope," he said. "A very grave crime, undoubtedly, but also the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind. No one has the faculty of knowing, only the Vatican . . ."

Judge Santiapichi cut him off at that point with the assertion: "I am running this trial."

When he was allowed to speak again, Agca said, "I am a man completely sane of mind. I am a rational man, rather intelligent."

Speaking from a chair in front of the judge, he added that what he said in the cage made some think he was "unbelievable or crazy."

"Such definitions should not take place in this trial," he said, insisting on speaking Italian even though a Turkish interpreter sat at his side.

Officials said more than 500 police patrolled inside and outside the courthouse, which is protected by a metal fence and barred windows. Police helicopters hovered overhead.

Scores of reporters and photographers pushed defense attorneys aside and climbed onto tables and chairs to watch as the defendants were led into their steel-barred cages — a security measure first used in Italy during terrorist trials in the 1970s. Of the defendants, only Antonov and two Turks besides Agca are in custody. Two Bulgarians and two Turks are being tried in absentia.

Tobor Aivasov and Zhelyo Vasilev, both former employees of the Bulgarian embassy in Rome, are the two other Bulgarian defendants. They fled to Bulgaria after the attempt on the pontiff's life and have refused to return to Italy for the trial. Italy and Bulgaria have no mutual extradition arrangements.

Apart from Agca and Antonov, the only defendants present Monday were Turks Omar Bagci, 38, accused of smuggling the pistol Agca used into Italy, and Musa Cerdar Celebi, 32, accused of being the contact man between Agca and the Bulgarians. The other Turk charged, Bekir Celenk, is in Bulgaria. Mr. Antonov is accused of driving Agca to the scene of the shooting on May 13, 1981.

The indictment charges that Celenk, a reputed Turkish mobster who operated out of Bulgaria, offered Agca and two Turkish accomplices the equivalent of $1.2 million to kill the pope.

Also missing from the trial is Oral Celik, Agca's boyhood friend, who allegedly also shot the pope in the assassination attempt.

Prosecutor Antonio Marini said the erratic behavior of his star witness "was merely a show for journalists" and would have no effect on his case.

He said he will deal first with details about the gun used to shoot Pope John Paul, calling five witnesses to establish the history of the 9mm Browning pistol.

Mr. Marini told the court of the arrest of Aslan Esmet on May 14 in the Netherlands, and said the Turk was found with a gun from a batch sold to Agca in Vienna, Austria.

The trial, which the Italian press has dubbed "the trial of the century" is expected to be tied up in procedural wrangling for days.

Antonov has repeatedly proclaimed his innocence, and a large Bulgarian delegation is attending the trial saying they want to make sure his rights are protected.

It is the first time such a system is being used in an Italian court. Translations are provided for lawyers and court officials in Italian, Turkish and Bulgarian.

When a reporter asked Judge Severino Santiapichi whether English was also being provided, he snapped: "We are in Italy. We are not a colony."

More than 150 journalists from all over the world attended the opening session and the four U.S. television networks for the first time set up a camera pool in an Italian court.

Correspondents from the Soviet Union and Bulgaria are particularly in evidence. Novosti, the Soviet state telecommunications organization, has set up a special TV feed to Moscow for the trial, an indication of how important the Kremlin views the proceedings. The outcome of the trial is sure to affect East-West relations.

Mr. Marini is expected to argue that Bulgaria helped carry out the plot against the pope at the instigation of the Soviet Union. Bulgaria and the Soviet Union for their part insist they have no connection to the shooting, and have accused the West of planning a "dirty wave of slander against the socialist countries."

Defense committees have been set up in all the member nations of the Warsaw Pact in an effort to bring pressure to bear against the trial. Italian newspapers have reportedly been flooded by letters from the Soviet bloc.

The Italian press is not shy to point a finger at what it terms the "ringleader" in the papal shooting. Scoffing at what is termed to be the "timidity" of much of the Western media, many Italian dailies unequivocally lay the blame at the Kremlin's doorstep, particularly that of the late Soviet leader and former chief of the KGB Yuri Andropov.

*This article is based in part on wire service reports.*